

Identity, Investment, and Language Learning:
The Case of Arab Immigrant Women in The United States
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Abstract

Building on Norton's (2000) poststructuralist view of identity as a multiple, changing, site of struggle, this qualitative study aims to provide in-depth analysis about the dynamic relationship between identity, investment, and English language learning for Arab immigrant women in the United States. Furthermore, the present study adopts a critical discourse analysis as a methodological framework to address the following research questions: (1) How are Arab women's identities shaped by their education and English learning in the United States?; (2) How were these women's investment in learning English intersected by their socioeconomic status?; and (3) What were the elements that led the Arab female participants' identity change? In order to address the research questions, narrative inquiry was employed using qualitative data, such as semi-structured in-depth individual interviews and a background questionnaire. The participants of the present study were three adult female English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, all from Arab origins. The findings suggested that the female participants were highly influenced by their sociocultural identities in a way that affected their personal and educational pathways. Furthermore, the results showed that their socioeconomic status impeded their investment in learning English. Finally, the study findings revealed a strong identity change due to the separation from the cultural standards and expectations for women in their home countries. This study points to the need to incorporate the learners' culture in the target language instruction to facilitate the identity transformation and help their language learning improvement and success.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the people who led me to my success and have walked alongside me during my lifetime and especially these three years. Luckily, they provided me with opportunities, supported me, and opened my eyes to what I am capable of doing. Without their support and love, I would not be the person who I am today.

First, I dedicate this thesis to my father, my role model who has always been near to me. Since I was an infant and new to this world, he has provided unconditional love, care, and belief in me. Without his faith in me and my potential, I would not have gained confidence and kept working. I also dedicate this thesis to my mother, for her endless love and support at every stage of my life. Thank you for teaching me how to be an independent and fearless woman.

I also dedicate this thesis to my sisters for inspiring and encouraging me. In particular, I would like to note my sister Nouf and dedicate this thesis to her; she has been my partner in crime and a friend. We have learned everything together, shared fears, and kept many secrets. Without her support and encouragement, I would not have succeeded in my studies.

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Glossary of Terms

Ambivalence: The “uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart” (Block, 2007, p. 864).

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis.

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

ESL: English as a Second Language

Identity: “How a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the Future” (Norton, 2000, p. 5).

Investment: “The commitment to the goals, practice, and identities that constitute the learning process and that are continually negotiated in different social relationships and structures of power” (Darvin & Norton, 2018, p. 2).

Material Resources: Refers to “capital goods, real-estate, and money” (Norton, 2012, p. 47).

Power: The term power referred to the “socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions, and communities through which symbolic and material resources in society are produced, distributed, and validated” (Norton, 2012, p. 47).

Social Identity: “A multiple, site of struggle, and subject to change” over time and space (Norton, 1995, p. 9).

Symbolic Resources: Resources such as education, language, friendships.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Building on the poststructuralist account of identity, the term social identity was defined by Norton (2000) as a multiple site of struggle that is changing over time and place. Based on this account, the present study was influenced by Weedon's (1997) feminist poststructuralist account of identity. Weedon (1997) focused on examining the relationship between language, the learning experience, and social power. Therefore, as cited by Norton (2012), Weedon (1997) suggested that "language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also a place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (p.21). Similarly, Cummins (1996) focused on the relationship between identity and power. Therefore, Cummins argued that power relations play a major role in reinforcing societal inequalities in which the social division of resources supports dominant group of society and legitimize social inequalities. In this regard, language is considered as socially constructed in that it cannot be recognized as a separate entity (Bourdieu, 1977; Cummins, 1996; Weedon, 1997; West, 1992). This indicates that the influence of social power and the distribution of societal resources continue to affect language learners by limiting their access to the target language resources. Because language learners have multiple identities, they might be situated in a way that made them marginalized and less involved in the target language society. Darwin and Norton (2018) argued that features of identity such as gender, ethnicity, race, and class play a major role in shaping the learners' interactions and use of the target language. These features would interrupt the learner's investment in the language learning. In this regard, investment was defined as "the commitment to the goals, practice, and identities that constitute the learning process and that are continually negotiated in different social relationships and structures of power" (Darvin & Norton, 2018, p. 2). Therefore, due to the complex and multiple nature of identity, it is possible that social

powers (e.g., socioeconomic status, race, and gender roles) could impact the learner's investment and language use.

Drawing on the work of these researchers, the case of Arab female immigrants is worthwhile examining because of the dynamic relationship between their sociocultural identities and their educational choices and aspirations. In addition, their identity as immigrant women often makes Arab females feel disadvantaged by dominant social powers in the United States. Furthermore, very few studies have examined the experiences of Arabic-speaking women in the United States (see Alkarni, 2012). Therefore, the present study aims to explore ways that Arab women's educational experiences are primarily affected by their social identities, and how their positions as females restrict their choices and learning pathways. Furthermore, this study aims to investigate the impact of the social power by highlighting the conflict between the Arab female immigrants' investment and their socioeconomic status.

This thesis sheds insights into the role of identity in shaping the individual's learning experiences. It includes negotiation of identity, investment, and power and their relation to the language learning. This study aims to help language educators in understanding the inherent intersection between language learners' identity and their access to the target language. Such understanding can help educators in acknowledging and connecting the learner's home culture with the target language culture in order to promote language learning success.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts a poststructuralist, particularly, a feminist poststructuralist framework of identity. A poststructuralist perspective of identity perceives identity as multiple, contradictory, shifting, and subject to change that is socially constructed, and “reconstructed through language and discourse” (Kouhpaenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014, p. 200). Within the poststructuralist framework, identity includes negotiation of experiences in which within these negotiations the language learner presents more than on identity, and go through identity change. Furthermore, according to the poststructuralist account of identity, language learners are influenced by relations of powers which positioned them in a way that “may limit opportunities to speak or to be heard” (Darvin & Norton, 2018, p. 1).

Pavlenko (2004) defined the feminist post-structuralism as an account of language that aims to understand the how power is related to one’s knowledge, the role of language in the reconstruction and production of power. Such understanding of the relationship between language and knowledge can be achieved through the narratives of a certain marginalized group in the society such as women and immigrants. (Pavenko, 2004, p. 6). In this regard, power refers to the ability to impact others beliefs, values, attitudes by allowing dominant members of the society to control and shape less power individuals’ choices, behaviors, and desires.

To better understand the relationship between language learners’ identity and language learning process, this study also draws on Norton’s conceptualization of identity, investment and language learning. In early 1990, Norton argued that the ESL research did not acknowledge social identity as an essential part of both the language learner and the learning discourse. As a respond of such lack of recognition, she developed her well-known theory of language and identity. By examining five immigrant women in Canada, she aimed to understand the relationship between

identity, power, and access to English in both everyday naturalistic context and classroom environment (Norton, 2000). Thus, by utilizing such poststructuralist approach of language and identity as a theoretical baseline, this study is aiming to examine how the Arabic speaking females' language learning experiences were influenced by their identities and power in society. Another objective of the present study is to investigate identity transformation in the new country and the elements that reinforced such identity change. In this regard, it is important to mention that although the study discussed issues of identity and investment in a non-academic English as a Second Language (ESL) context, it would inform both ESL and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators to the critical role of identity and social power in shaping the learning experiences and on accessing English in both classroom and day-to-day informal contexts.

Identity and Second Language Learning

Peirce (1994) argued that the second language acquisition (SLA) domain did not recognize the role of the language learners' social identity in shaping their access to learning resources. Instead, the SLA research was looking at personality characteristics such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence as fixed traits that have major impacts on the second language learning and acquisition process. According to Norton Peirce (1994), these personality traits are "socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual" (p. 2). This highlights the importance of recognizing identity as a part of the learning process. According to Norton (2000), identity refers to "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). Again, building on West's (1992) account on identity, Norton (1997) defined identity as the individual's "desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation, and the desire for security and safety" (p. 410). Such personal

desire is inseparable from social powers like socioeconomic status or class because they might enable or restrict individuals from accessing the social resources.

In term of language, Bourdieu (1991) explained the relationship between language and social power. According to his stance, social welfare plays a major role in shaping the use of individual's language. Ige (2010) argued that like language, identity cannot be acknowledged as a separate entity, but it has roots in the larger social world. In fact, learner identity, especially, L2 learners, is interrelated to the learning process. In addition, researchers such as Wenger (1998) argued that the learning is placed in "the context of our lived experiences of participation in the world" (p. 3). Based on this account, learning is seen as a social event that cannot be separated from the individual's social background. However, several tenets fall under the umbrella of identity such as social, culture, ethnic, and gender identities. The following review of literature discusses each category of identity and reviews research that examined the relationship between each category and language learning within different learning contexts.

Drawing on the poststructuralist identity approach, Norton (1995) referred to social identity as "a multiple, site of struggle, and subject to change" over time and space (p. 9). Building on Bourdieu's (1977) work of language within the poststructuralist approach, perceived language as a part of social power in which the quality and usage of the language is determined by such power. The focus of the social identity domain is on "the negotiation of differences, ambivalent, structures, and agency, community of practice, symbolic capital, or any or any other construct associated with poststructuralist identity" (Block, 2007, p. 867). In her seminal study about the relationship between social power, identity, and the language learners, Norton Peirce (1994) examined how social structures affected the learning opportunities of five immigrant females in Canada. The findings of her study supported her notion about social powers in which these powers have an influential impact

on learning and accessing the target language. Furthermore, the results strongly supported her argument about the impact of motivation, extroversion, and confidence and that these personal traits are governed by social relations of power (Norton Peirce, 1994). Several research drew on Norton's conceptualization of identity and the association between social identity and language. For example, Chang's (2016) qualitative case study examined the case of two Malay and Chinese native speakers who were ESL students at a community college in the United States to investigate the impact of the sociocultural norms on the construction of identity. The findings indicated that the adult ESL participant's learning experiences were affected by their sociocultural backgrounds. Similarly, building on Norton's work on identity and investment, Ray's (2016) study investigated the relationship between social class and English language learning process. She examined 33 Gujarati (Indian language) immigrant women in the U.K. The results demonstrated that the participant's social class played a critical role in accessing English educational opportunities and shaping their interactions with target language culture.

Different from the ESL context, several studies attempted to understand social identity through the language learning process in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. For instance, Vasilopoulos (2015) investigated identity negotiation and investment in a Korean EFL context. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether adult EFL students acknowledged their multilingual identities through the learning process. Also, the study investigated how language learning affected and created the participants' social and self-identities. It found that EFL learners were challenged to practice and use the target language in this type of a learning context. The participants utilized their own strategies to improve their fluency and competence in this EFL context. In addition, the results showed that negotiating the target language identity in this non-native EFL context is problematic and challenging for EFL students. Similarly, Gu (2010) investigated identity construction in EFL

learning contexts in China. The focus of the study was on the individual differences between the learners in constructing their identities and on the impact of their social and educational surroundings. The finding suggested that individual differences in identity construction such as their social, gender, and linguistic backgrounds has a strong effect on their ways of identity construction.

Several studies focused on immigrant learners' cultural identities and examined their impact on their access to the new language. Cerviatiuc (2009) examined the features of adult immigrants as "good language learners" that helped them to overcome marginalization issues and succeed in language learning. Cerviatiuc (2009) also shed light on the role of cultural identity in shaping language learning and professional success. Such focus on immigrants' identity, whether social or cultural, helped the present study in understanding how the immigrant learners' identities might guide or hinder their success. Bauer et al. (2015) examined young language learners with immigration backgrounds in Germany to understand the role of identity on their language development. Again, the result suggested that the relationship between language learners' culture and learning is inseparable. Bauer et al. (2015) reaffirmed Norton Peirce's (1994) assumption about the dynamic relationship between the social world and the language learner. Although the above studies examined different age groups in different learning contexts, they both supported the importance of regarding identity as a "site of struggle between the subject and the society's perception of that individual" (Norton, 2000, as cited in Bauer et al., 2015, p. 306). The participants in both studies were able to notice the change in their social identities, and this recognition influenced their learning experiences. The differences between the language learner's home culture and the culture of the target language made the learning journey a complex one. Several researchers (Fantini, 2009; Liu, 2016; Schumann, 1978) shed light on the crucial relation between L1 and the target language culture. On one hand, the similarities or shared features between the learners' culture

and the target language's culture may serve as a facilitator of the language learning. On the other hand, the variations between the two cultures may block the language learner from accessing language and attaining a higher level of competence. Liu's (2016) study investigated cultural collision among non-native speakers of Spanish in Colombia to examine the relationship between learners' cultural identity and their communicative competence in the target language (English). The results revealed that the participants made significant efforts to build their target language identity while using the new language. Such efforts were due to the influence of the norms of the participants' native cultures and the target culture, both of which impacted their target language competence. Liu's (2016) findings are significant for this current study because there is a distinction between the Arab female immigrants' cultural identities and the U.S. culture. Such cultural differences led Arab females struggle to develop English communicative competence and socialize with native speakers of English. However, the difference between Liu (2016) and the present study is that Arabic language and culture are different from the culture of the United States, and that difference could have a larger impact on learning.

Investment

Norton (1995) attempted to draw distinctions between motivation and investment because the former simply refers to the learner's desire to learn the language and represents a characteristic of the learner's personality whereas the latter provides more complex and accurate interpretations of the relationship between a language learner and both social and self-identities. Thus, Norton Peirce's (1995) conceptualization of investment perceived the language learner as having multiple identities and desires that are changing across time and space. This understanding of investment as a culturally and socially constructed was built on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. Based on Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) concept of cultural capital, Norton (2000) defined cultural capital as "the

knowledge and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups in relation to specific sets of social forms” (p. 51). In this regard, she argued that having investment in the L2 learning will increase the learners’ chances to access learning and social resources, which will help in improving their cultural capital. Most of the research on identity and investment described the conflict between social identity and learner’s investment in language learning and their relations to social power, which in turn affected the learners’ abilities to interact and improve their spoken abilities in the target language. Other studies showed how learners with high levels of investment were able to overcome social and cultural obstacles that might interrupt their access to the language resources.

The following review of the literature focused on such relationship and its impact on adult ESL and EFL learners. Lee (2010) conducted a longitudinal case study on a Korean graduate student in the United States to understand the role of investment on a participant’s language improvement and engagements in the L2. The results showed that the participant’s investment in the language and her changing identity helped with the ease in establishing L2 interactions and improving language proficiency. Similarly, Kim (2014) argued that the field of pragmatics misinterpret L2 learners’ learning difficulties in which learning failure was because of their low levels of motivation and their limited knowledge of the L2. Instead, Kim suggested that such learning difficulties or failure is related to the learner’s identity and other sociocultural aspects that impacted the learning process. Therefore, Kim’s study investigated the relationship between the ESL learner’s investment and his or her language use and pragmatic choice. The results presented a strong correlation between the ESL learners’ attachment to their social identity and their choice of pragmatics. Furthermore, personal factors related to the participants such as period of residence in the United States, social class, and age were responsible for their language choice and use. Most importantly, the findings presented that the ESL participants’ investment in learning has major impact on their language

choice and use. Chang's (2016) study on discourse, identities and investment in language learning examined the role of ESL students' identity and sociocultural powers on their investment in language learning. Different than the previous studies, Chang (2016) examined the shape of the relationship between the learners' socioeconomic status and investment in the learning. The findings suggested that the participants' learning experiences were clearly shaped by both their cultural and social identities, which in turn impacted their future goals and desires. Moreover, the participants' acknowledgment of their multiple identities helped their investment in learning English. This study provided insights for the current study regarding the possible conflicts between social power and the learner's investment in learning the target language. However, the educational contexts are different, and the current study focused on a certain ethnic background (Arab females) to examine this dynamic factor. In their longitudinal study, Michel, Titzmann, and Silbereisen (2012) looked at the factors that resulted in a language shift among Russian native speakers in Germany. The finding showed that learners' motivation (investment) in the learning provided them with a wider access to German and assisted their interactions and socializations with German native speakers, which in turn caused language development. Similarly, Hajar's (2017) longitudinal study examined the role of learners' identity and investment on their language learning experience in both their home country and the United Kingdom. The aim of this study was on how the learners' social, family, and educational backgrounds affected their learning outcomes. The results indicated that the learners' socioeconomic background and family history has major effects on their success and learning experiences. The participant from the socially disadvantaged background was primarily affected by his investment in the learning, which led to desirable outcomes. In a Muslim context, Sa'd (2017) examined the role of identity on learning English as a foreign language in Iran. Again, the results revealed that the EFL participants' motivation (investment) in learning English for attaining better

social positions and future opportunities impacted their success and development in the L2.

Overall, the presented literature on investment sheds light on the importance of acknowledging the learners' investment in learning the target language because even with the social constraints, they were motivated to develop linguistic competence in the target language. Therefore, like the previous reviewed studies, the aim of the present study is to draw the language learning educators' attention to the importance of encouraging the learners' investment in both the target language and their native language to achieve desirable learning outcomes.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity drew the attention of language and identity research because it is an influential element in the language learning process. Trofimovich and Turuseva (2015) defined ethnic identity as “a subjective experience of being a part of an ethnic group, and in case of L2 learning and use, the ethnic group in question typically are learners' own (ancestral) ethnic group and one or more target language (L2) communities” (p. 235). In the case of the current study, the female immigrants' ethnic identity shaped their language use and perceptions about interacting with others. Being an Arab women in the United States is considered a challenge because of the stereotypes about Arabs and Islam. These stereotypes included accusations of terrorism, oppression against women, and inaccurate perceptions about Arab women. Such stereotypes impacted the participants' interactions and socializations with the target language context. Several studies focused on the positive impact of ethnic identity, whereas other studies focused on the negative side. For example, Cerviatiuc's (2009) examined the role of human agency in accessing the target language through social interaction. The participants of Cerviatiuc's (2009) study came from different ethnic backgrounds and were considered successful language learners. Those participants employed their own strategies to surpass the barriers of their ethnic identities that might prevent their usage and

socialization in the target language. In the L2 context, several studies shed light in the positive relationship between ethnic identity and language learning (Gatbonton & Trofimovich, 2008; Polat & Schallert, 2013). The reason for the success was because the L2 learners were able to acknowledge both their ethnic background and the new language cultural identity (Trofimovich & Turuseva, 2015). This understanding of the two identities positively influenced the L2 learner's attitudes toward the new language. Contrastingly, studies such as Paladino et al. (2009) investigated the impact of ethnic stereotypes on the Italian learners' achievement in the target language of German. The results showed that the L2 learners did not perform well in the test because of the stereotypes that they heard before the test. Another study conducted by Gluszek and Dovidio (2010b) showed how negative assumptions about L2 ethnic group influenced their L2 development and discouraged their interactions. Davila's (2017) qualitative study discussed the impact of marginalization against immigrants in Sweden on their L2 development and mastery. The results supported the earlier studies' findings in which the learner's ethnic backgrounds determined the L2 learner's access to the target language society and attitudes toward such social context. Finally, Berardi-Wiltshire's (2012) longitudinal study observed the relationship between EFL learners' ethnic identity and their motivation in language learning. The results suggested that despite the complexity of the EFL context that limited the use of the target language, guiding the learners' motivation and supporting it would help to develop their L2 competence. Notably, this review of literature on ethnic identity suggests that sociopolitical issues are one of the most important aspects of ethnic identity that can lead to negative attitudes toward the target language.

Gender and Second Language Learning

The fields of language learning, TESOL, and applied linguistics consider gender and its relation to the language learning process. Within the research on gender and language learning,

gender has been viewed as an integral part of the social and cultural structures of power. Therefore, most research on gender and language has focused on the role of gender positionalities through the lens of immigrant women and EFL female students. Norton and Pavlenko (2004) argued that gender should be acknowledged as one of the most influential and critical aspects of identity because the impact gender roles exists across different social, cultural, and educational domains. Historically, men were seen as the dominant gender group, and women were dominated by them. Such gender supremacy affected the women's social and educational opportunities and desires. However, women in Western countries today have become more independent and responsible for their own lives and choices. On the other hand, men's power and dominance over women still exists in other parts of the world such as the Middle East region. In such sociocultural contexts, women were perceived as voiceless and passive members of the society and language speakers.

A review of the literature presents how gender identity shapes the learners' L2 learning experiences and opportunities to develop high levels of proficiency. Several studies shed light on how the L2 learning experience helped in re-shaping women's social and cultural identity. Norton (1995, 2000) was one of the first researchers who examined how gender inequalities that were shaped by cultural, ethnic, and social perceptions limited five women's learning opportunities and use of English. Giroir's (2014) case study showed how the new learning context impacted three immigrant women so that they could negotiate issues of social and gender identity and thus enable them to reconstruct their own social identities. The findings showed how language learning classrooms can provide stimuli identity negations and recognition by involving the students in social and communicative practices to strengthen an understanding of identities. By presenting how gender roles shapes the learners' identities and perspectives of themselves, Lu and Luk's (2014) study indicated the impact of social beliefs regarding the roles of men and women. Lu and Luk (2014)

examined the idea that women are better candidates in the field of language learning and that this field is a domain of women rather than men. By examining two women and two men in a Chinese EFL context, the findings showed that the female participants had higher levels of investment in language learning than male participants. One reason was social positioning, which made learning easier for the female students and helped them develop their performance. Another reason was the social perception of men, which gave them an excuse to fail or have a low performance in language learning process. However, Schmenk (2004) shed light on the role of social stereotypes on the construction of language learners' gender identities. She suggested that social beliefs and assumptions of a gender group have major effects on the domain of language learning and the learners' identities.

Rind's (2015) study investigated how women as language learners were influenced by the social perceptions of women's roles in society. Rind (2015) noted that females were described as a defect gender group. By defect, he meant "the phenomenon by which women were inferior language users and oftentimes as the muted group who speaks a powerless language" (Rind, 2015, p. 3). The study was significant because it looked in depth at different educational and social contexts than had been examined before, specifically a context in the Middle East, and in particular, Pakistan. The finding suggested that most of the female students were affected by gender identities that constrained their usage of the target language (e.g., interactions with male instructors and colleges), and hindered them from getting access to the L2 learning resources and developing their communicative competence in the L2. The results also showed that some female students were resistant to their expected social standards and accepted the change in both social and gender identities. Similarly, Mahmud (2010) examined the impact that gender roles have on shaping the learning attitude of female university students in Indonesia. The findings revealed that the female students' gender

identity governed their language use, in the presence of male students, they preferred to be silent and avoided interacting with males. Furthermore, during the class, the female students chose to work with their female peers over males. Alzeer (2016) examined gendered spaces within a single-gender learning context in the United Arab of Emirates. According to this research, these gendered spaces were situated by sociocultural assumptions of gender. Under this sociocultural positioning of gender, most of the female students were neutral in that they did not accept or reject gender segregation. Alzeer's finding revealed that some female students were resistance to such gender mobility and were motivated to negotiate their feelings toward such cultural practices (p. 14). Rind (2015), Mahmud (2010), and Alzeer (2016) discussed gender positioning in conservative cultures that are similar to this study's participants' cultures. The Arab female participants of this study faced similar cultural constrains that affected their learning attitudes and choices. The difference is that the earlier studies were conducted in a foreign learning context whereas the present study is in an ESL context.

Recently, there has been a growing interest in examining issues of gender and language learning by focusing on the cases of refugee and immigrant women. For example, Hatoss and Huijser (2010) discussed the unequitable learning opportunities that are provided to immigrant and refugee women and implicitly supported by educational policies in Australia. They examined how Sudanese refugee women were positioned in a different linguistic and cultural setting. Due to the lack of recognition of the female refugees' cultural background, Hatoss and Huijser (2010) argued that although the educational policies in Australia provide support and learning opportunities to refugees, they did not notice the linguistic and cultural barriers that would jeopardize the female refugee's learning opportunities and access (p. 158). Similarly, Ray (2017) shed light on gender identity construction of immigrant Gujarati women, an ethnic group in Western India, in when they were studying in the United Kingdom. The results found that the women's cultural and

socioeconomic backgrounds influenced the quality of education that they received in the United Kingdom as well as their access to learning opportunities. While several studies have examined gender identity and language learning among Asian and East Asian females, few studies have dealt with Arabic immigrants. Mango (2012) discussed how Arab American females are challenged by the stereotypical views about Arabs and Arabic culture. Some women were affected by cultural stereotypes in which they chose silence over “speaking up” (p. 83). On the other hand, other Arab females decided to speak up and face these stereotypes. Finally, Hruska (2004) investigated gender roles in ESL context. She examined ESL kindergarten students to understand gender construction through the learning context. Based on the results, Hruska argued that L2 student’s access to the L2 contributed to the social ideologies of gender.

In sum, gender identity and roles have a significant impact on shaping women’s positions in societies. In the field of language learning, whether ESL or EFL, the body of research on language and identity had shown how learners’ gender identity impacts their educational choices and learning experiences. This indicates that language and identity research should draw the SLA educator’s attention to recognizing the role of social identity aspects (e.g., socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity) in shaping the learners’ learning experience to guide their language development and success. Therefore, one of the objectives of the present study is to examine the relationship between the participants’ gender identity and their language learning achievement. It will also investigate how those women’s gender roles have been changed in the L2 social context.

Adult Immigrant Language Learners and Non-Profit ESL Programs

Historically, the United States is a country built by immigrants, and the number of immigrants that are foreign-born increases every year. According to the Census Bureau Statistics (2014 and 2015), the number of immigrants living in the United States reached 42.4 million in 2014.

Thus, the U.S. educational context is one of the most diverse educational contexts of the world. To meet the educational needs of such population, most U.S. public schools and universities provide ESL programs that help non-native speakers improve their English language proficiency. Non-profit community or church-based organizations also provide English language support for immigrants with low socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, such non-profit organizations mostly did not receive federal funding, which challenges the ESL teachers and students to get access to language learning resources and support (Schaetzel & Young, 2008).

Due to the increasing number of immigrants in the United States every year, researchers have found it important to study adult immigrants' needs to acquire and learn English. This need is characterized by personal, social, and economic factors. For instance, getting a job requires a knowledge of English, and thus immigrants will learn English to improve their social and economic status. Many U.S. immigrants are motivated to learn English to pass citizenship tests and become socially active in the new community (Marshall, 2002). Furthermore, immigrant parents have a strong desire to learn English to be involved in their children's academic life and communicate actively with their schools and teachers (Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995).

As a response to adult immigrants who need English language education, many non-profit organizations (community or church-based) provide ESL support for adults. According to Chao and Kuntz (2013), non-profit adult ESL programs assist adult immigrants to meet their desired employment and personal aspirations and help them to be involved in the new society (p. 467). Chao and Kuntz (2013) examined identity transformation in a church-based adult ESL site. In this case, socioeconomic status and lack of access to formal academic educational opportunities left adult immigrants only able to access a non-academic language learning programs. Chao and Kuntz (2013) argued that the adult immigrant's low socioeconomic status forced them to enroll in such religious

organizations that could have missionary purposes, which might conflict with their cultural or religious beliefs. The participants of the present study joined a church-based ESL program for adult females. This church-based organization provides English language classes and services for international and immigrant women and is run entirely by English native-speaker volunteers.

Based on the literature on language learning, identity, and investment, the main goal of the current study is to examine the relationship between the language learners and social powers (e.g., class, socioeconomic status, and culture). This study has a focus on the female immigrants' gender identity and identity transformation within the new society.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my research to investigate the relationship between Arab ESL females' identity, their investment in the language, and the language learning experience:

1. What is the relationship between the Arab ESL females and their social identity?
2. To what extent has their socioeconomic status impacted their investment in learning English?
3. What are the elements that led the Arab females to identity transformations?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter begins with this the research design and the researcher positionality. Then, it discusses the research site and participants plus a detailed review of the participants. Finally, it discusses and explains the implemented data collection, analysis, and coding procedures.

Research Design

The present study adopted a qualitative narrative inquiry to investigate the possible impacts of identity and social power on female students' language learning experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) defined narrative inquiry as "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p. 20). Notably, TESOL research presents a growing interest in conducting narrative research. Such tendency toward narrative research is governed by the nature of the TESOL domain that values the role of the learner's culture and background in the learning. Thus, the narrative inquiry aims to understand the learners' backgrounds through their own stories, and this understanding would help second language educators in creating a rapport with their students. According to Bell (2002), the focus of narrative inquiry goes "beyond the use of narrative as rhetorical structure, that is, simply telling stories, to an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates" (p. 208). Accordingly, the focus of the narrative method is not only on the learners' stories but also on how to construct meaning from their realities and experiences. Therefore, the use of narrative inquiry helped this study in extracting meaning from Arab female immigrants' stories and analyzing these stories based on the addressed research questions. Analyzing the learners' stories allows the researcher to explore their untold beliefs and perceptions. In case of the current study, the participants' narratives offered a deep understanding of the identity transformation and the reasons behind this identity shift. Similar to Norton Peirce's (1994) study, this study aims to construct issues of identity, power, and language learning through analyzing and making meaning of the personal stories that were told by the Arab female immigrants. These stories were valuable and provided insights into the critical role of social power (e.g., class and gender) in shaping their realities and how these social factors restricted their personal and educational desires.

Researcher's Positionality

Drawing on the notion of reflexivity that refers to the researcher's acknowledgment of his or her own experience and relation to the research (Cho, 2014; Rodriguez & Cho, 2011), I believe that including my social, cultural, and educational experiences would help in gaining insights about the impact of social structures such as gender, class, and race on the participants' educational experiences and language learning investment (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011, p. 225). Therefore, my position as an insider of the participants' cultural and social background played a major role in the present research. I had multiple roles in the presents study as a native Arabic speaker and as a co-teacher in the participants' learning context. First, I am an Arabic speaking woman who shares the same first language of the participants, and similar cultural and social norms. Second, I worked for a year as a co-teacher in the community-based ESL program where the participants received English language education. Both roles were advantageous to this study because they helped me to establish a rapport with the female immigrants and thus gain their trust which in turn made the interviewing process easier and encouraged the participants to negotiate issues related to their social and gender identities. Unfortunately, the cultural and religious stereotypes about Islam and Arabs in Western countries made immigrants from Middle Eastern backgrounds more careful, suspicious, and uncomfortable in discussing issues related to their cultural, social, and religious backgrounds. But my position as a member of the participants' culture made me trustworthy and created a comfortable and natural interviewing environment. In addition, sharing similar religious affiliation, and social and cultural background made me more aware of the impact of social beliefs and standards on these women's educational and occupational pathways.

Another important factor is that immigrant Arabic speaking women, especially those with low English levels, tend to avoid interacting with English native speakers or to individuals with

different L1 backgrounds. Due to social and gender positioning in Arab cultures, interacting and communicating with males is considered inappropriate. Thus, Arab women feel embarrassed and uncomfortable when communicating with men even if they are from similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Although the participants of the present study speak the same first language, they come from different cultural backgrounds in which some had fewer restrictions on interactions with men. However, being both female and Arabic speaker is advantageous for this research because the participants felt comfortable in sharing their own cultural experiences and their views of the new society.

I was born and raised in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia, which has a conservative social culture. In such traditional societies, men are the most appreciated gender and have control over women; women tend to be powerless and voiceless. Because of this, women have passive role in their personal, educational, and occupational pathways. For instance, it is usual for female students to be forced to drop out of school based on their (male) guardian's decision. Women who work are assigned to limited types of occupations such as teaching, and administrative sectors (gender segregated). I am from an upper-middle-class background and grew up in a liberal and less conservative family. Both my parents had a university education; my father has a master's degree in electrical engineering from the United States, and my mother has a bachelor of arts in English Literature from Saudi Arabia. Unlike most of the women at that time who were mostly housewives, my mother worked as an English teacher at a public school, and her role in the family was equal to my father. Because of this, I was raised differently from the typical social and cultural norms and beliefs. For instance, my family encouraged values of gender equality including the importance of women to have equal personal, political, educational, and employment rights in society. Coming from an upper socioeconomic status and being raised by these liberal values affected my educational

and personal choices. I completed my undergraduate studies in Saudi Arabia and then I decided to study abroad to get my Masters' degree in TESOL. Normally, families in Saudi Arabia do not encourage their daughters to study abroad and live in a foreign country because they feel it is unsafe for a woman to live by herself. However, my parents welcomed such opportunities and supported my sisters' and my decisions to live independently. Belonging to a liberal family who supports gender equality while coming from a society that restricts females educational and life pathways has provided me with a deep understanding of how the social power and cultural perceptions of gender have unavoidable impacts on females' language learning experiences and achievement. Again, my critical role in this research as an insider helped in gaining insights about power relations of different social aspects and their impact on female immigrant's educational desires and experiences. As a culture insider, I was able to observe the growth and change in the participants' social and gender identities. Finally, coming from socially privileged background enabled me to compare my own cultural experience with less privileged women.

Research Site and Participants

Although the interviews were conducted outside the learning site of the participants, it is essential to include information about their learning context to understand better how the participants' socioeconomic status influenced their access to learning and English learning opportunities. All the participants are enrolled in a non-profit church-based organization that provides an ESL program for female adults which is. I first met the participants one year ago when I was volunteering as a co-teacher at beginners' level classroom. This learning context offers English support and education only for adult international women. Due to their limited resources, the ESL program provided two hours of English classes twice a week (Tuesdays and Thursdays). Most of the students that I met there complained about the limited time of classes as they believed such limited

time slows their English learning progress. This learning context appeared to be their only choice because of their socioeconomic status.

The participants of the present study were three adult female immigrants whose first language is Arabic. They came from three different countries, Iraq, Libya, and Morocco, and decided to immigrate for personal purposes such as war, marriage, and poverty conditions. The participants' ages ranged between 28 to 40 years. The length of their residence varied between two to five years. In addition, all the three participants were affiliated with the same religious background (Islam). Table 1 shows information about the participants, their origins, length of stay in the United States, and religious affiliations. The following sections will provide detailed reviews of each female participant.

Table 1

Participants' Basic Information

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children	Home Country	Length of Stay in America	Religious Affiliation
Amal	28	Married	Five	Iraq	Four years	Muslim
Hadeel	34	Married	Four	Libya	Two years	Muslim
Carolyn	40	Married	None	Morocco	Two years	Muslim

Amal

Amal was a housewife from Iraq and is 28 years old. She married at age 16 and dropped out of school before getting married. Amal's husband used to be a lecturer at a University in Iraq, and currently he is a Ph.D. student in the United States. They had five children (three sons and two daughters) between the ages of four months to nine years. After finishing sixth grade, her father decided that she should leave school because he believed that if she could read and write, there was

no need for her to study anymore. Amal and her husband decided to immigrate to the United States because they wanted their children to live in a safe country and receive good education.

Amal came from a large family, and she does not even know the exact number of her siblings because they were from two marriages. Her father is married to two wives, and he had an elementary education, whereas her mother is illiterate. According to Amal, she and her siblings lived in a small house, and due to her father's work, he was not around most of the time. After getting married to her husband, Amal lived with her brother-in-law in his family's small apartment for eight years until they moved out to the United States. She stated that for the first time in her life she had her own house when they arrived in the United States.

In addition to their low socioeconomic status, Amal and her family were suffering from the Iraq war in 2003. Her hometown was destroyed by air strikes several times and they are still living with the consequences of the war. She mentioned stories about how they escaped to small villages around her city to survive from the air strikes. Also, she mentioned that even after the fall of the dictator Saddam Hussain who was the president, the United States soldiers kept coming to their houses to ask and look for armed Iraqis who supported Saddam. Although at that time she was not aware of the serious dangers of the war, she does remember how she and her siblings were terrified at that time.

The cultural and social norms and standards of her community controlled her life and educational opportunities. Her culture treated men differently from women in the ways they were appreciated and respected. In her family's household, her parents preferred their sons over their daughters and the children had no control over their choices. Amal stated that she and her sisters were not allowed to go out of their house whenever they wanted to, and girls were expected to stay at home and help in home duties. She mentioned that when she was in third grade, her mother

assigned her to work in the kitchen and clean the house. Her parents did not care about school homework, and they had never helped her or her siblings with school duties. Also, her male siblings were given the choice to complete their education or to drop out of school, whereas she and her sisters were forced to drop out of school after sixth grade. The cultural perceptions about being female in Amal's family constrained them from getting equal rights with males. In contrast, Amal's husband and his family looked at females in a more open light. In her husband's family, daughters were raised equally to sons and they encouraged girls' educations. Most of the females in her husband's family finished their high-school education and a few of them entered a university. Those who finished their high-school education were not interested in completing their undergraduate studies and preferred to marry and create families. Furthermore, in contrast to her family, girls could go out and visit their friends. As a result, Amal felt more appreciated and comfortable with her husband's family in such a way that she avoided visiting her family.

Hadeel

Hadeel is a housewife from Libya whose is 34 years old. She is married to a petroleum engineer who has a Ph.D. degree from a university in the United Kingdom. Hadeel has four children (three girls and a boy). She was born in Colorado in the United States when her father was a university student there, but her mother was illiterate. Although she is a U.S. citizen, Hadeel had a limited English proficiency and did not remember her life in the United States because her family returned to Libya when she was three years old. Due to her father's educational level and love of knowledge, she was able to get a high school degree and entered a community college where she had a Business Administration major. She came from an upper-middle class, and her father owned a family business with his brothers. Hadeel's father imported electricity tools (electrical equipment) from Italy, and he is a well-known businessman in her city.

Similar to most Arabic speaking countries, the cultural and religious norms and standards played a major role in her personal and educational life. Hadeel's father and uncles were always concerned about their daughters' safety and did not want them to interact with males. They believed that enrolling females in gender-segregated schools would protect them from being attracted to and manipulated by men. For instance, her desire to enter the law school was rejected by her father because universities in Libya are mixed gender. Also, Hadeel and other females of her family were not allowed to work in jobs that involved men. However, Hadeel believed that her father is supportive and loving and he only wanted to protect her and her sisters.

After graduating from the community college, Hadeel got married to her husband who was an engineer at the ministry of petroleum in Libya. Before moving to the United States, she and her husband lived in the United Kingdom for four years. The reason for their residence in the United Kingdom was because her husband was sent by his job to get a Ph.D. degree. For the first time, Hadeel was able to recognize the differences in the lifestyle of western countries and her country. She appreciated the respect of one's privacy and the right to live freely without social interventions.

After returning from the United Kingdom, Hadeel lived in Libya for three years, and then she and her husband decided to move out to the United States. A significant reason behind their decision was Libya's social and cultural controls that made them feel everyone wanted to invade their privacy and values. Moreover, after the Arab Spring (a revolution against the dictatorships in Arab countries), the Libyan citizens suffered from an economic downfall and violence, which made life challenging and less safe. Therefore, Hadeel and her husband believed that moving to the United States was the best solution for their children, as they wanted better educational and future opportunities and to live in a safe environment.

Carolyn

Carolyn was born in Casablanca, Morocco, and she is 40 years old. She moved to the United States two years ago after getting married to a half Arab, half American husband. She does not have children and lives with her husband and his children from a previous marriage. Early in her life, although she was Muslim, Carolyn was enrolled in a Christian boarding school outside of her hometown until she was in the tenth grade. Her parents wanted her to get a French education that would increase her opportunity to work in France. Due to the high rates of unemployment in Morocco, which has caused widespread poverty, Moroccan people prefer to move to France and get French citizenship for better job opportunities, which in turn will develop their socioeconomic status. However, she was raised apart from her siblings and was only able to visit her family on the weekends. Carolyn mentioned that she did not have close relationships with her siblings and that her mother was her only friend.

The nature of the Moroccan society is unique because it is tied to cultural and religious standards, and at the same time it appreciates liberal values. Also, Moroccan society was affected by the French colonization so that French is the second most spoken language there, as most Moroccans are bilingual speakers of Arabic and French. Despite the European influence, gender discrimination exists in Moroccan society as males have greater freedom and better opportunities whereas females are less free and are dominated by men. In Carolyn's case, gender roles did not play a significant role in her life, as her parents raised and treated their sons and daughters equally.

Carolyn received a French-based education and was raised according to strict values in the Christian boarding school. Female students in the boarding school were expected to follow a fixed schedule and respect it. For instance, female students had a daily routine: they had to get up early at 5:00 am, take a shower, get ready for classes, and write a daily plan that they followed. Such strict rules taught her to respect time, keep her promises to others, and to complete her tasks without

procrastination. Unfortunately, she could not finish her secondary education because of her mother's illness. For her, taking care of her sick mother was more important than finishing her education. After the death of her mother, she decided not to complete her education and instead get a job. Because she liked fashion design, she worked as a secretary in a clothing factory in Morocco. According to her, working in such place allowed her to improve her drawing abilities, and senior designers taught her fashion skills. However, she could not see join the fashion design industry because she had to get a degree in this domain.

Two years before coming to the United States, Carolyn met her husband and they decided to move to the United States. For her, living in the United States has been a dream since she was a teenager but she did not expect that it would happen. Her marriage was a traditionally arranged marriage like most of the marriages in Arab countries. Carolyn's husband owns a small business, and their economic status did not allow her to enroll in an academic ESL adult education.

Data Collection

The data of the current study was gathered from two data collection sources, which are a questionnaire and semi-structured one-to-one and group interviews. The interpretive nature of the qualitative research requires methods that reinforce interpretations and focused observations to construct theories and answer the research questions (Atieno, 2009). Thus, the data collection sources helped in identifying the purpose of this study, which is examining the influence of identity, power, and investment on language learning. The main purpose of the data collection process is to get unbiased views or understanding about alliances between one's identity and his or her personal and educational pathways, particularly the language learning experience.

Background questionnaire

A background questionnaire was administered before beginning the interviews to gather basic personal information about the female immigrants, and this served as a baseline for the interviewing phase. Therefore, the questionnaire helped in getting to know each participant. Due to participants' limited knowledge of English, the questionnaire was brief and simple. Also, the aim of this questionnaire was getting a basic understanding of each participant so that there was an understanding about each participant before beginning the interviewing phase.

Semi-Structured individual and group interviews

The major source of data was semi-structured interviews held over a one-month period that included open questions. The choice of open questions resulted in naturalistic conversations that provided instances of identity negotiations. The questions represented the themes of the study and ensured that the conversations did not drift away from the study's purpose. In contrast to the closed-ended question, these open questions encouraged the female immigrants to share their opinions, feelings, aspirations, and desires. Furthermore, such open discussions allowed them to acknowledge how their cultural, social, and religious backgrounds shaped their personal and educational experiences. Each female immigrant participated in two to three interviews that lasted for an hour. Most of the interviews were conducted at the participants' homes and a few interviews were held in a coffee shop. During the interviews, the researcher directed the discussion and focused on discussing family, cultural, religious, and educational issues. The issues of gender positioning and gender roles took half of the interview time because they were the most controversial and influential features of the immigrant females' lives. Finally, because the participants already knew each other from the learning context, a group interview was useful to compare their experiences and to learn to what extent their language learning experiences were affected by their social and gender identities. The group interview was conducted in a coffee shop and lasted for two hours. The nature of the

group interview was more naturalistic and less structured, which provided many opportunities of identity negotiations. The group interview helped in drawing conclusions about the critical relationship between identity, social power, and English language learning.

Data Analysis

The present study is adopting a critical discourse methodology to examine the relationship between learners' identity (i.e., social, gender, and cultural) and language learning experiences and progress. Generally, the critical discourse analysis "is interested in uncovering ways in which social structures of inequality are produced in and through language and discourse" (Lin, 2014, p. 214). In term of language, the critical discourse analysis does not treat language as a linguistic entity but recognize it as a part of a larger social structure. Therefore, the focus of the CDA is on how language is shaped and impacted by social structures such as gender, class, and ethnicity. According to this stance, language generates social inequalities and function as a part that produces and normalize social inequalities (Lin, 2014). Such perception of language helped me in shaping this study's view of the critical role identity and social power in shaping and transforming the adult female learners' personal and educational pathways.

In analyzing the data of the present study, the researcher utilized a combination of inductive and deductive data analysis to address the research questions. Both methods helped this research in examining Norton Peirce's (1994) theory of identity, investment and language learning. Also, this approach draws attention to the transitions of gender roles and Arab females' identities in the new country. This approach has an integral role in this study. The deductive approach helped in addressing the research question and purpose, whereas the inductive approach allowed the researchers to construct and generate new themes that emerged from the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Through the data analysis phase, three basic procedures were used. First was a

search for concepts or themes that were related to this study purpose and research questions. Second was the collection of examples (translated quotes) from the interview transcripts that were related to the concepts. The third step was the analysis of these concepts to find commonalities or differences between these themes or concepts. The following section will present detailed information about the data analysis procedure.

Interviews Transcriptions, Translation, And Coding

After the completion of each interview, it was transcribed manually into Arabic transcripts. The transcription duration was approximately four hours for each audio file. After transcribing the interviews of each participant, they were then translated from Arabic to English. In doing so, the aim was not to translate every part of the transcripts. Instead, the most relevant conversations and stories that were related to the research questions and purpose were translated. Throughout the translation process, the goal was to be as objective as possible and provide the most accurate translations. Because a critical discourse framework was adopted for the data analysis, the focus was on exploring the sociocultural aspects of the participants' experiences and the role that these aspects played in shaping the female immigrants' identities and learning opportunities and experiences. However, attention was also paid to providing grammatical translations of the Arabic transcripts.

The coding process utilized a combination of inductive and deductive thematic analysis. A computer-based software was used, which is ATLAS. Ti 8, to analyze and code the interview data. The first part of the coding phase included creating a set of general themes that were primarily related to the research questions before starting the analysis (e.g., gender roles, investment, the impact of social powers, cultural background, and socioeconomic status). This technique helped to gain an initial understanding of the data and drawing connections between the data and the research questions. Second, the interviews were distributed into chunks of data and sentences and paragraphs.

After that, the distribution process created sub-codes that were related to each major theme in the initial themes list. Then, the individual quotes were sorted for each theme (code) together. Also, major themes related to each other were combined, and an examination was done to determine how these themes were related to each other. The following table presents an example of the final analysis.

Table 2

Final Coding Schema

Initial Theme (major code)	Descriptive Quote	Sub-code
Gender positionalities and roles	<p>Hadeel: My family is too conservative. My father and uncles always wanted to protect us (females in the family). My father is educated and have knowledge in Islamic studies. He taught me and my siblings good manners such as honesty, how to be responsible, and encourages us to be learn about different things. They were too protective (her father and uncles). They did not allowed girls in the family to enter the university because it is mixed-gender.</p> <p>Me: But you enter the university? Right?</p> <p>Hadeel: It was not a university, I entered a gendered segregated community college. Two years' degree in Business administration.</p> <p>Me: How about males in your family?</p> <p>Hadeel: Males in my family were allowed to study in the university. My cousin studied at the dentistry school, and he is now a dentist. But they were afraid about us (she meant females).</p> <p>When I was at high school, one of my teachers told me that she sees me as a lawyer. I wanted to study law but she encouraged me, especially that I graduated with a high GPA. But my father felt that it is unsafe to me as a girl to study with male students at the same university. Also, because of his business, he used to travel a lot and there was no one can take me every day to the university. Females in my family were not allowed to use public transportations so he did not agree.</p>	<p>Gender inequalities</p> <p>Control over females</p> <p>Sociocultural perceptions about females.</p>

Identity Transformation	<p>Amal: My personality has been changed in the U.S. Now, I can give an opinion, accept or refuse anything that is related to me or my family.</p> <p>Me: Did you felt that your voice is heard after coming to the U.S.?</p> <p>Amal: Defiantly, there is no one can decide instead on me.</p> <p>Me: Do you see yourself as a typical woman in your culture? or do you feel that you are different than the other women in your society?</p> <p>Amal: No, I am different. I became a person who gives her opinion no matter what. For example, no one in my family can argue with my father, if he decided to do something then he will do it. After coming to the U.S., if I felt that he was wrong in a family issue, I would tell him even if he became angry with me.</p> <p>Me: ... And do think that you can convince him with your argument?</p> <p>Amal: at the beginning, he was surprised that I had the courage to speak up and was very angry with me. But after a while he got used to it and started to hear me.</p> <p>Me: Why do you think you had changed?</p> <p>Amal: My husband gave me the freedom to speak up and encouraged me to have an opinion. Also, I am smart, and I know how to act and what to say. I can decide what is right and what is wrong. Also, I know what is best for me and my family, and what is not.</p>	<p>Speaking up.</p> <p>Resistance to the home culture.</p>
Immigration Experience	<p>Me: Why did you decided to move to the U.S.?</p> <p>Hadeel: Because of the political situation in the county (Libya), my children's future.</p> <p>Me: Does living there was life threatening or unsafe? It is not unsafe, but it is complicated.</p> <p>Me: How?</p> <p>Hadeel: The quality of the services that are provided by the government is not as it used to be. For example, schools there are weaker than it used to be. The educational system used to be better and stronger.</p> <p>Me: What else?</p> <p>Hadeel: The healthcare services were not good enough for my daughters because they needed to get</p>	<p>Political situation</p> <p>Lack of public services</p> <p>Low economic status</p>

	hormonal medications and hospitals there did not provide such kind medications.	
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Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Several procedures were used to ensure that this study was ethically administered. These procedures included ensuring confidentiality of the participants' information, getting written consents from the participants, and providing an interviewing atmosphere that enabled the participants to share their personal information without feeling uncomfortable, confused, or suspicious. While conducting the present research, and collecting the data, the researcher maintained and took under consideration several core ethical principles to ensure creditability, transferability, and confirmability of this study. This was an adaptation of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) research evaluation criteria that focused on these three criteria.

To ensure credibility, which stresses on the truthfulness of the findings, three techniques were utilized: prolonged engagement, persistent observations, and member checking. First, I was able to build a good rapport with the participants (prolonged engagement) during my volunteering experience as a co-teacher in their ESL learning context. Knowing the female immigrants for one year before conducting the study helped me to gain an understanding about their sociocultural and educational backgrounds. Also, I maintained classroom observations (persistent observations) for one year and again before conducting the present study. The classroom observations provided insights about the participant's sociocultural backgrounds, immigration experiences, language learning progress, and motivation in the learning, which in turn allowed me to know them better. I

discussed my findings with participants during the group interviews that was conducted after finishing and analyzing the individual interviews (member checking). Such technique helped me with drawing conclusions and generating new themes related to the study's purpose.

To ensure transferability, I focused on drawing relationships between the participant's sociocultural backgrounds. For that, it was essential to utilize and include their own words exactly as each participant said them to enable the readers to examine and compare this study's findings with other studies' conclusions (Shenton, 2004). This technique of transferability is called thick description, and it is used to ensure that the current study's findings can be seen in other language learners' experiences in different ESL learning contexts.

To ensure confirmability that focuses on building the research findings on the participants' themselves and avoiding the researcher biases, I utilized the triangulation technique, despite the time limitations, by gathering the data from two sources: the background questionnaire and the individual and group interviews. I used the triangulation technique to ensure the richness of the data and to get a broad understanding of the participants' sociocultural backgrounds and their impact on the English learning process. As the researcher, I focused on maintaining reflexivity by incorporating my role as a researcher, an Arabic native-speaker, and a co-teacher in their learning context. Earlier in this chapter I had discussed how my role as a researcher played a significant in guiding me to investigate the chosen participants' identity in its impact on their personal and educational choices. In addition, my background as a researcher impacted shaping this study's findings, building my arguments, and drawing conclusions (Malterud, 2001).

In sum, this chapter provided detailed information about the methodology that was utilized. To that end, the following items were discussed: the research design, the researcher positionality, learning site and participants, researcher role, the data analysis process, and ethical considerations

and trustworthiness. The following chapter will provide a comprehensive explanation of the findings of the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings & Discussion

Findings

Although the findings led to different social and cultural aspects that had major impacts on the female immigrants' learning pathways, I decided to focus on the role of social and gender identity on learning English in the United States. The analysis of the interviews' data highlighted three major themes which addressed the research question. In fact, throughout investigating the aspects related to the Arab females' identities that significantly impact their educational pathways, it was evident that sociocultural standards, which reinforced gender inequalities, played a crucial role in shaping their learning experiences. In addition, although the three females varied in their level of investment in English learning, their socioeconomic status had strongly interrupted and influenced their access to English and learning opportunities. Thus, formal ESL education was not a choice because the participants were not able to afford it. However, one of the participants was able to overcome this obstacle and made significant self-learning efforts to attain English fluency and improve her socioeconomic status. Finally, the third theme that emerged from the data was identity transformation in the target language culture. Interestingly, the Arab females were able to overcome the sociocultural restriction of their home countries through their immigration experiences. These experiences strengthened them and enabled them to have control over their choices and desires.

In this chapter, I discuss the current study's findings and answer the research questions within the following themes: The Arab females' sociocultural backgrounds and gender positionalities, investment vs. socioeconomic status, and the Arab females' identity transformation.

The Arab Females' Sociocultural Backgrounds

The first research question of the present study investigated the relationship between those Arab women's identities (their sociocultural backgrounds), and their personal and educational pathways. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that the learning process, by itself, is a social construct in which social powers (e.g., class, culture, and gender) determine how and when the learning took place. Furthermore, social powers have a major control on the quality of the individual's learning. Moreover, the individual's culture and society have unavoidable impacts on his or her life choice and desires. For that, it was important to understand the role of the Arab female participants' sociocultural background to be able to examine its impact on shaping their learning experiences and attitudes toward the target language society. This study shed light on such dynamic role of the participants' sociocultural backgrounds to understand how such factor affected their learning and settlement in the new society. Therefore, the following sections will highlight the impact of the Arab female participants' sociocultural backgrounds in shaping their identities (personalities), and on the quality of the education that they received:

Amal

Throughout the interviewing process, it was observed that Amal was the most disadvantaged participant by her sociocultural background. The influence of her sociocultural background was observed through three aspects: her education, childhood, and early marriage.

Firstly, the cultural perceptions of females prevented Amal from attaining her fundamental right to education. When she was 11 years old, Amal was forced to drop school after sixth grade. The reason behind this decision was the cultural expectations of females, which states that if a girl can read and write, then there is no benefit of completing her education. Apparently, she had no choice in such decision, even though she had educational dreams:

Excerpt 1

Amal: Our life back there was painful, most families are conservatives, but my husband's family is not. Girls were not allowed to go out or visit their family and friends, even a girl's education is associated with her father or brother's well. For example, most girls after sixth grade leave school because they can read and write.

(Amal, February 2018)

As shown in the excerpt above, it was clear that the cultural values limited Amal's access to similar learning experiences with males in her family and her society. Again, such cultural expectations of a certain gender group (females) shaped her personality and had control over her educational choices. Her dream of being a dentist or an engineer was destroyed by these sociocultural standards.

Second, as a child, her position as a female in her family made her responsible for duties that were too hard for her. Instead of focusing on her studies or enjoying childhood activities, Amal was responsible for household duties. According to Amal, she wished to experience a normal childhood, and play with other children or do her homework instead of working in the kitchen:

Excerpt 2

Amal: I did not live a normal childhood. Since third grade, I was assigned to household duties. Every day after coming from school, I had to spend most of my day in the kitchen. At the begging, I only had to wash the dishes and clean the kitchen, but after two years I started to cook for my family.

(Amal, February 2018)

As presented in the excerpt above, there was a loss of childhood in which her role as a female prevented her from acting like a normal child. As a young girl, she had to deal with responsibilities that were above her age and abilities. Apparently, these household duties impacted both her educational development and her desire to enjoy the things that other male children could do. Consequently, it was evident that the sociocultural standards and expectations of females shaped her

personality so that she was powerless and voiceless and prevented her from living a pleasant childhood.

Finally, although she was not really forced, Amal found herself a wife and a mother by the age of sixteen. It was culturally accepted for females to get married at an early age. However, Amal regretted getting married at a young age because she was heavily burdened by the responsibilities of such dramatic transition from a child to a mother and wife:

Excerpt 3

Researcher: Have you regret getting married early?

Amal: Of course yes. I was young and responsible for things that were beyond my abilities. I had to tolerate stress and other family issues to save my marriage.

(Amal, February 2018)

Amal's identity as a female positioned her in difficult living situations. As a female, her life was not comfortable compared to males of her age. She had to deal with stress and responsibilities that was beyond her tolerance. According to her, due to her young age, she suffered from social interventions in her marriage. These interventions influenced her relationship with her husband and invaded her privacy.

Hadeel

Similarly, Hadeel's life was governed by the sociocultural perceptions and expectations of women. Although these expectations had a major impact on her life, she was able to deal with them and pursue her education. Because her father had a university education and she belongs to an upper intermediate social class, Hadeel was able to access better educational opportunities. Unlike Amal's culture, Hadeel's culture encouraged female education, under certain conditions such as being enrolled in gender-segregated schools, and universities. Otherwise, females will not be allowed pursue their education in such gender mixed learning contexts. Hadeel herself experienced such

situation when she decided to major in law after high school. Sociocultural rejection affected her desire:

Excerpt 4

Hadeel: They were too protective (her father and uncles). They did not allowed girls in the family to enter the university because it is mixed-gender.

Researcher: But you entered the university? Right?

Hadeel: It was not a university, I entered a gendered segregated community college. Two years' degree in Business administration.

Researcher: How about males in your family?

Hadeel: Males in my family were allowed to study in the university. My cousin studied at the dentistry school, and he is now a dentist. But they were afraid about us (she meant females).

When I was at high school, one of my teachers told me that she sees me as a lawyer. I wanted to study law but she encouraged me, especially that I graduated with a high GPA. But my father felt that it is unsafe to me as a girl to study with male students in the university. Also, because of his business he used to travel a lot and there was no one can take me every day to the university. Females in my family were not allowed to use public transportations so he did not agree.

(Hadeel, February 2018)

The excerpt above shows the critical role of Hadeel's sociocultural background in shaping her educational experience. Although she was an outstanding student, her identity as a female prevented her from pursuing an education in the desired field. Instead, she only able to earn an associate degree (two-year degree) which is less than her educational expectations.

The Influence of Gender Positionalities

The role of gender positionality in the female immigrant societies is undeniable and has a substantial impact on their personal and educational pathways. Throughout the interviews, it was evident that the participants experienced gender inequalities in their home cultures. The cultural expectations of males were different than of females within the family, community, and the larger society. According to the female participants, the cultural standards and expectations made men's life easier and gave the freedom over their choices and attitudes in the society. In contrast, women in such conservative cultures had to follow the sociocultural expectation. Indeed, gender positionalities

controlled their attitudes within their families, the society. Mostly, those women had passive roles, their voices were silenced, and their contributions to their families were limited. However, the primary focus of this study is on how gender positionalities in a given society influenced women's personalities and their educational choices. For example, as mentioned earlier in the above section, Amal was prevented from pursuing her education just because the social perception of girls to be protected at home. For that, being able to read and write was simple enough for her as a girl. Amal had always dreamed about pursuing her education and entering the university. But she had more significant responsibilities as a young wife and mother. Even though her husband was supportive, her position as a wife and caregiver hindered her from chasing her educational dreams. In contrast, due to such gender positionalities in the society, which gives men privilege over women, her husband was able to complete his graduate studies and seek better career opportunities. Men supremacy in her home culture and its impact on her life was mentioned several times throughout the interviews:

Excerpt 5

Researcher: In your family, were there different expectations for sons and daughters?

Amal: although I was my dad's favorite daughter, but they (her parents) treated boys differently, they preferred a boy over girls.

Researcher: How?

Amal: My brothers can go where ever they want without my parents' permission, but me and my sisters were not allowed to go anywhere. The answer for a daughter's request was always no... in my family everything was different for girls. We were not allowed even to go shopping, my mother used to bring us everything. We did not have a choice.

Researcher: Can't you go with your mother?

Amal: No, in my culture it was not appropriate for a girl to go out for shopping. They made everything complicated for us (women).

Researcher: Did you and your sister rebel against such cultural constrains?

Amal: Yes, if there was a chance but we had never done something wrong. We just went out for fun. Also, if me and my brother were arguing about something my parents would "shut me up" and tell me to respect my brother and listen to him, just because he is a boy and should be respected.

Researcher: Do they ask him the same when it comes to you?

Amal: No, in front of my brothers we should be silent and were not allowed to give opinions or argue with them.

(Amal, March 2018)

In the above excerpt, Amal stated explicitly that her male siblings were more appreciated than her and her sisters. Her brothers had freedom over their attitudes and choices. As females, Amal and her sisters were prevented from completing their education, visiting their friends and family, and go shopping. In contrast, these rules were not applied to her brothers who were allowed to do what they want. Even when it comes to expressing their opinions, Amal and her sister were not allowed to argue with their brothers and had to respect and follow what her brothers are saying. Culturally, arguing with males and disagreeing with them is considered as an act of rudeness. Thus, such gender positionalities in Amal's culture unequally made her role as a passive one and kept her voice silenced.

Similarly, the nature of Hadeel's culture unequally positioned her differently than males. Coming from an upper-middle social class and having an educated father made such gender positionalities less influential in her life. However, it was evident that her identity as a female limited her educational choices, and impacted her attitudes within the society. As a result, her role as a female in the family and the society was less affective and a passive one.

The Arab Females Investment in Learning English

The second research question sought to investigate the relationship between the female participants' socioeconomic status and investment in the learning. To begin with, although all the three participants of the present study were highly invested in learning English, their levels of investment varied and found to be structured by their social identities (Norton Peirce, 1994, p. 7). Furthermore, the reasons for their investment in learning English differed but mainly were to attain better socioeconomic status and social positions. However, I focused on how the participants' investment in learning English was interrupted by their identities as immigrants and having a low

socioeconomic status. Several studies such as Chang (2016) examined the role of the participant's socioeconomic status in shaping their language learning experiences. Thus, I aimed to observe this impact on the Arab female immigrants' English learning experiences and how their investment helped them overcome such socioeconomic barriers. This study also intended to shed light on how the females' investment intersect with their socioeconomic status and the impact of such intersection.

This section highlighted the conflict between the participants' socioeconomic status and their investment in learning English. Drawing on the Arab females learning experiences in the United States, the present section investigates the reasons behind their investment in the learning and how these reasons pushed them toward the learning. Finally, this part of the results focuses on Carolyn's experience, the Moroccan participant, because she was the most invested in the learning, comparing to the other two females, to be involved in the new society and improve her socioeconomic status.

Overall, all the female participants (Amal, Hadeel, and Carolyn) were highly invested in learning English to be involved in the new society and to increase their income. Unfortunately, their desire for learning English was interrupted with different social, economic, and personal factors. Their socioeconomic situations played a key role in their access to the learning. Generally, all the female participants faced a socioeconomic transition because of their immigration. For most of them (except Amal), their socioeconomic status in their home countries was higher than in the United States. Such socioeconomic transition escalated the number of responsibilities that they had to deal with to survive. For instance, as primarily caregivers and housewives, Amal and Hadeel worked as a cooks and babysitters to support their families. Apparently, their home and work duties and responsibilities left them with a limited time to learn and practice English. Furthermore, due to their economic status, they could not afford to access formal English learning programs. For example,

Hadeel explicitly stated that the most prominent hinderer for her to learn English was her financial situation:

Excerpt 6

Researcher: Have you searched for a formal English language program or school for adults?

Hadeel: Yes, my husband tried to find me an affordable ESL institution, but all of them were too expensive, we could not afford the tuitions. My husband's friend told him about student's loans for U.S. citizens but again we cannot afford being in debt.

(Hadeel, March 2018)

As shown above, Hadeel's economic status and her position as a mother, wife, cook, and babysitter restrained her from getting a better language learning education and developing her English abilities. This is a clear example of how the learner's identity may interrupt his or her learning experience and investment.

Although Hadeel was highly invested in the learning, she had other responsibilities which she believed that they are more important than the learning. Her position as a caregiver and a wife was more important than getting an appropriate learning opportunities:

Excerpt 7

Researcher: Have you tried to participate in out of class activities to improve you speaking skill?

Hadeel: No, I have household tasks that prevent me from going out of home and practice English, especially because my husband work all the day. Everyday, I take my kids to school, clean the house and cook, and help them with their homework. Also, I cook food and sell it, and work as a babysitter. By the end of the day, I just want to go to sleep.

(Hadeel, March 2018)

As shown in the excerpt above, Hadeel's identity as a mother and housewife intersected with her investment in the learning. She was prevented from practicing English and improving her language abilities due to the responsibilities that were more important to her than the learning.

Similarly, Amal's investment in the learning was interrupted by her identity as mother and housewife. Although she wanted to be proficient in English to improve her socioeconomic status,

she could not devote out of class time to practice English. For Amal, taking care of her house and children was more important than developing English language proficiency. She did have a strong desire to learn English because it would open the doors for attaining the desired job and developing her family's financial situation. It was evident her identity as an Arab woman made her prioritize her role as a caregiver and housewife over her identity as a language learner.

The case of Carolyn was the most interesting one because of her high level of investment in English learning and her linguistic background. Since she was young, Carolyn's had dreamed of moving out to America and becoming a fashion designer. After arriving at the United States, Carolyn struggled with learning English because of two reasons. First, her low socioeconomic status limited her access to a formal ESL program. Second, the nature of her linguistic background interrupted her English learning. Because the Moroccan Arabic dialect is a mixture of both Arabic and French due to French colonialism, Carolyn unconsciously mixed English with French. According to her, mixing up English with French made her feel disappointed and less competent than her classmates. Throughout the interviews, I noticed that she was challenging and pushing herself toward the learning:

Excerpt 8

Carolyn: In the beginning, I used to cry all the time, I wanted to learn English as fast as I could. But I did not find any support from Arabs who are living here, and whose proficient in English. In contrast, I founded the English native speakers more supportive, and they always encouraged me to speak even when making grammatical errors or using wrong words. Here, I started to convince myself that I am strong and capable, and started to meet and talk with English native speakers. At first, I used to listen to them and how they use the vocabulary within their speech. I recorded all the conversations that I heard in my mind and tried to use them as much as I could. This helped me with understanding what people were saying, and they were impressed that I can understand them, even though I could not talk to them fluently.

(Carolyn, February 2018)

The excerpt above showed how Carolyn in the beginning was disappointed by her misuse of English. Notably, the excerpts presented how she decided to overcome such frustration by inventing her learning strategies and forcing herself to interact and socialize with English native speakers. Despite the conflict between her social identity and investment, she was able to overcome such conflict by finding a way to improve her English language proficiency.

In addition to her desire to accomplish higher socioeconomic status, Carolyn's high level of investment in learning English was associated with her husband's use of English as a primary language. Her husband is a half American-half Arab who uses English more than Arabic at home, and with his family and friends. Her limited English abilities kept her silenced during family and friends' gatherings. Apparently, her limited language abilities weakened her and made her feel inferior and different. Here Carolyn decided to put extra efforts and improve her English to be involved in her new society:

Excerpt 9

Carolyn: I do not want to depend on my husband in translating every word and conversation to me. I want to be independent, it is enough! When they talk, I remain silent. My silence is killing me... I want to interact ... to be involved in their discussions.

(Carolyn, February 2018)

As showed in the excerpt above, Carolyn's sense of being disconnected and isolated from her new society motivated her to devote time and efforts to practice and improve her English. According to her, having limited English proficiency negatively affected her personality and silenced her. As a response to such undesired change, she was determinant to make extra efforts to improve her language competence and to feel appreciated by the new society.

I can argue that Carolyn's investment in the learning was guided by her social identity as a non-native speaker of English which limited her ability to be a part of the society and realize her

future dreams. Therefore, the linguistic and socioeconomic challenges made her determinant to develop linguistic competence in English to be involved in the society. For instance, like Cervatiuc's (2009) participant Adi, Carolyn interacted with native speakers and was open to their corrections because she believed that such feedback would help in improving her English proficiency. Thus, such conflict between her investment in the learning and accessing the language helped her in reconstructing her social identity and motivated her to develop English language proficiency.

The Arab Females' Identity Transformations

The third research question investigated the elements that led these females to identity transformations. Interestingly, the Arab female participants went through a major identity transformation through their immigration experiences. This shift of identity is associated with being distant from their home countries. Instead of having limited freedom of choice, the immigration experience strengthened and motivated them to have control over their own lives and choices. This identity shift made them independent and with strong personalities. Throughout the interviewing process, it was clear that this transition or transfer enabled them to have the initiative in reconstructing their own social identities. Throughout the interviews, all the three women were aware of this change in which they favored it because it allowed them to explore what they can do. Recognizing the variations of their roles as women at their home-cultures and in the United States enabled them to decide how to position themselves in their families and the society. This identity transformation was observed through the change in their personalities, gender roles, and future educational and career decisions.

On one hand, the participant reported that being apart from their Arabic sociocultural standards made their lives easier and made them more independent and in charge of their personal

choices. For instance, it was evident that Hadeel acknowledged such change in which she described this change about her immigration to the United States:

Excerpt 10

Hadeel: In Libya, I did not have friends because I was always surrounded by family and relatives. But here (the U.S.) I made friends and I became social. My personality has changed a lot! After living in U.K for four years, I noticed that I changed. I did not change much but I was not as I used to be in Libya. After moving to the U.S. I became even stronger. For example, because I had some fears, I used to ask my husband to talk to the salesman or a doctor instead of me. But now I can speak for myself.

Researcher: Why do you think you had changed? Is it the society or your new friends?

Hadeel: Yes, the society especially after I learned how to drive and created my own business. Before, if I needed money I used to ask my husband or if I wanted to go out I had to ask for his permission or ask him to take me out. I used to depend on him. But now I do everything by myself, even sometimes if I needed him (the husband) he refuses and tells me to do it myself. Even my sister, who's now living in Canada, told me "now I feel I'm independent ... a human being".

(Hadeel, February 2018)

The above excerpt shows how the immigration experience reinforced such identity transformation.

Evidently, Hadeel's identity of the target language was entirely different than her home culture identity. According to her, she became outgoing, social, and independent. Unlike living in Libya, moving out to the United States enabled her to get out from her comfort zone and establish new friendships (mostly with native Arabic speakers). The immigration experience strengthened her as a female; she was detached from the need of a male partner to manage her life. Moreover, she became able to do her daily tasks without the help of her husband. In contrast to the cultural believe of man as a protector and guard, Hadeel was liberated from the notion of needing a male to feel safe. Living in the United States enabled her to have equal gender roles at home and to have a strong opinion.

Amal as well presented a significant identity transition. In the abovementioned themes, I discussed how she was the most influent participant by her sociocultural background. Before moving to the United States, she had a passive, powerless role in her family. In contrast, the immigration experience made her more confident, independent and had a heard voice. The interviews showed

how Amal reconstructed her identity and how she admired the change in her personality and role in her family.

Excerpt 11

Amal: My personality has changed in here. Now, I can give an opinion, agree or refuse anything that is related to me or my family.

Researcher: did you felt that your voice is heard after coming to the U.S.?

Amal: Yes, of course. Now not one can decide instead on me.

(Amal, March 2018)

In the excerpt, above, Amal was aware of the change in her identity and desired this change. The change in gender roles enabled her to have a more equal gender role to her husband's. Unlike her position at her home country, Amal was responsible for her family and able to make decisions related to herself and her family. In the United States, Arab females had stronger positions in the new society and their families. Such gender and social repositioning were shaped by the distance from the sociocultural standards and rules that negatively impacted these women lives and educational pathways. This finding corresponds to Lee (2010) female participants in which moving to a new society empowered them and made and allowed them to "find their voice" (255).

On the other hand, despite the socioeconomic constraints, Arab females had control over their educational choices. For the first time, they were able to decide their learning opportunities and plans. All the three women were highly invested in learning to get better job opportunities and improve their socioeconomic status. Therefore, Amal decided to enroll in the community-based ESL program six months after arriving at the United States:

Excerpt 12

Amal: I stayed at home during my first six months in the U.S. I did not want to go out unless if my husband goes with me.

Researcher: Did you make friends at that time?

Amal: Yes, I did. But I did not know how to drive, and after getting my driving license I started to go out by myself to the ESL program.

Researcher: Why did you decide to learn English?

Amal: My friends told me about this ESL program and they told me that it will change me a lot. Before I got my driving license, my friends used to drive me to Small World.

Researcher: What about your social life?

Amal: I became free, thank god! Now I can go wherever I want, whenever I needed to. Especially after all my kids entered school. I am enjoying my life in here, and I did not want to go back to my country and live that hard life.

(Amal, February 2018)

As presented in the excerpt above, Amal made her own decision to learn English after spending six months at home. This decision was not influenced by her husband's will. She concluded that learning English would open previously closed doors so that she could have a career. Again, we notice the impact of immigration of her identity transformation as she was able to plan and choose her education and career pathways. Having such freedom was due to the separation from her home culture and its rules.

Finally, most of the participants decided to work from their homes in order to financially support their families. This is considered a massive change in their positions as Arab females. Before coming to the United States, they had not worked and were entirely dependent financially on their fathers or husbands. Such a self-reliant act was observed in the interviews as they were planning to pursue their university education after improving their English fluency. Hadeel discussed her future:

Excerpt 13

Researcher: What are your plans for future?

Hadeel: Personally, I want to finish my undergraduate studies. If I could afford my education, I will finish the ESL program and even get a Master's degree.

Researcher: Why do you think pursuing your education is important for you as a female?

Hadeel: I believe that pursuing my education would be a huge accomplishment in which I will realize my dream of getting graduate degree. No doubt, earning a graduate degree will provide me with a better job opportunities and a better life. For that, learning English would be the first step in realizing my dreams.

(Hadeel, March 2018)

The above excerpt shows how Hadeel's immigration opened her eyes to things that she could not think about in her home country. Her immigration identity made her determined to improve her educational status to improve her socioeconomic class. Again, being apart from the Arabic sociocultural standards allowed her to realize her educational aspirations and to seek better career opportunities.

Similarly, although she is in her late twenties and had barely finished elementary schools, Amal was determinant to pursue her education if she could improve her financial situation. Besides her husband's support, she stated that living in the United States and being distant from the cultural standards motivated her to complete her education:

Excerpt 14

Researcher: Are you planning to complete your education?

Amal: Yes, I will. First, I want to finish middle and high school. Then, I want to enter the university. I would like to major in science and to major in engineering or dentistry. Since I was young, this was my dream, but unfortunately, I could make it happened. My husband is supporting me and we always discuss my educational plans... he always gives me hope and encourages me.

(Amal, March 2018)

Notably, in the abovementioned excerpt, Amal has a strong desire in completing the education that she was prevented from pursuing it. Her immigration experience and her husband's support gave her hope to realize her educational aspirations. All these changes would not have happened if she did not liberate herself from the sociocultural restrictions of her home country.

This indicates significant sociocultural differences between Amal's home culture and the culture of the United States. In her culture, there were sociocultural rules, standards, and expectations that made her daily life difficult and controlled. In contrast, after immigrating to the United States, she felt less pressured and was able to decide what was best for her. Throughout the

interviews she expressed how the new culture made her life easier. Again, Amal's immigration experience enabled her to reconstruct her identity and negotiate the difficulties and obstacles that she faced at her home country and how that impacted her whole life, especially her education. Amal's personality went through a change because of her immigration experience that strengthened her and allowed her voice to be heard.

Discussion

The major findings from this study are as follows: the strong influence of the Arab females' identities on shaping their learning experiences and attitudes toward the new society, the problematic relationship between these women's investment in learning English and their socioeconomic status, and the impressive identity transformation that they went through as a result of moving from their home cultures to the target language culture. The findings indicate that the Arab female participants had a variety of identities within each of them. Similar to Norton's (2000) participants, these females had several identities such as wives, mothers, immigrants, and language learners (Kouhpaenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014). Thus, such multiplicity of identity corresponds with the poststructuralist view of identity which conceives identity as a "fluid, multiple, diverse, dynamic, shifting, subject to change, and contradictory" (Kouhpaenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014, p. 200). The results supported Weedon's (1997) feminist poststructuralist perspective of identity or subjectivity as he used the term to refer to identity. Thus, the present study's findings showed how the female participants' experiences and social power (e.g. socioeconomic status, gender, and class) influenced both their educational experiences in general, and their English language learning.

First, it was important to investigate the sociocultural factors that shaped these women's choices, desires, and educational pathways to be able to understand the relationship between the participants' identity and English language learning. The findings provided insights into the

significant role of the participants' cultural identities in shaping their personalities, attitudes, and learning experiences. Evidently, sociocultural standards and expectations of women prevented these ladies from accessing better learning resources. Also, such sociocultural standards influenced their learning and personal attitudes. These findings are aligned with Rind's (2015) research in which the Pakistanis' females learning attitudes were congruent with the sociocultural standards and expectations of women in Pakistan.

Amal was prohibited from pursuing her L1 education at an early age because of her gender identity. Being a female in a conservative culture required her to follow these sociocultural rules. These cultural restrictions limited her educational opportunities, and her educational desires were shattered by them. Additionally, her gender identity limited her freedom of speech and ability to express her thoughts and opinions. Hadeel went through similar situation due to her cultural and gender identity. She was prevented from pursuing her education in her desired field due to cultural beliefs of females. The sociocultural perceptions of women prohibited her from enrolling in mixed gender learning contexts that were considered culturally inappropriate. Such cultural standards and expectations, which boosted gender inequalities, changed her entire future career. Instead of becoming a lawyer, Hadeel was limited to being a housewife. It can be observed from the findings that the relationship between the Arab female immigrants' identity and their learning choices is an integral one.

Another significant finding was a dynamic relationship between the participants' investment in the learning and their socioeconomic backgrounds. Based on the data, the females' socioeconomic status and positions as immigrants limited their access to a formal ESL education, which lowers their levels of investment. In accordance with the poststructuralist account of identity, the findings provided evidence of the changing and multiple nature of identity. Clearly, these women had

multiple identities (e.g., language learners, immigrant, mothers, and wives). In this regard, the participants' position as immigrants, caregivers, and mothers intersected with their investment in learning English and improving their proficiency. Because identity was described by Norton as a "site of struggle," the female participants were struggling in reconstructing their social identities (1995, p. 9). First, because of the Arab females' position as immigrant women in which they were less fortunate in accessing a quality of learning that promotes language learning success. As the results showed, these female learners' financial situations and position as immigrants left them with limited learning opportunities. Here we notice a conflict between their desire to learn and the social distribution of the resources. West (1992), as cited by Norton (1997), suggested that the individual's desires are inseparable from "the distribution of material resources of society" (Norton, 1997, p. 410). With such limited access to the societal resources, these women were challenged to learn English and improve their proficiency. This impact of power and distribution of social resources and materials confirms the argument about the integral relationship between language, identity, and power (Bourdieu, 1977; Cummins, 1996; Weedon, 1997; West, 1992).

Second, the female participants' position as mothers, caregivers and cooks required them to focus on domestic responsibilities and duties that conflicted with their investment in developing English language proficiency. These women's socioeconomic status obligated them to focus on domestic duties and improving their financial situations by working as a cook from their homes. Dravin and Norton (2018) argued that identity categories such as ethnicity, race, and gender play a key role in shaping the learner's interactions with the social world. The learner's socioeconomic status and social class determines their interaction with the target language society. The findings highlighted that the Arab females' ethnicity, gender, and social class had a strong impact on their socialization with the target language world in which they had limited opportunities for interaction

with English native-speakers. These findings correspond to Ray's (2016) study on the role of power relations such as social class, race, and gender. Ray's (2016) findings showed that the females' social class and gender identity determined their access to the language discourse. Also, because they had multiple identities and positions, the Arab females were positioned in a way that restricted their abilities to socialize and interact with English native speakers. The findings showed that the Arab participants tended to establish friendships based on their native language and avoided socializing with native-speakers because they felt marginalized and different. Although they were able to perform basic dialogues with a cashier or a waiter, they could not establish deep conversations with English native speakers nor create friendships. For example, Hadeel was not interested in having native-speaker friends due to the cultural and linguistic differences. According to her, having such friendships would not be comfortable because she would never be understood and would always feel inferior or different. Additionally, the differences between her cultural beliefs and native-speakers' beliefs may intervene in such friendships and create a gap. For Amal, her lack of prior English education that hindered her from interacting with English native-speakers. She tended to create friendships based on her native language. Similarly, Amal believed that such friendships made her comfortable, understood, and less marginalized.

The variation in participants' socioeconomic status and positions created differences in their levels on investment. For instance, the influence of Carolyn's socioeconomic status, which was higher than the other participants, left her with higher levels of investment in the learning and better learning opportunities. Although she could not enroll in a formal ESL program, her position as being married to an American provided her with access to the target language. Like Norton's (2000) participants Eva, Carolyn's social position enabled her to interact with native-speakers and practice her target language abilities. After using the internet to improve her English, she volunteered in a

hospital to improve her oral skills. Carolyn's social class gave her an access to the target language culture and enabled her to socialize with English native-speakers. Not having children and domestic responsibilities significantly impacted her chances to improve her linguistic abilities, which increased her levels of investment in the language learning.

It is important to mention that the participants were positioned in social structures (their home countries and the United States) that controlled their choices and desires. This critical role of social power was presented in Cummins's (1996) work in which he argued that power indirectly encourages social inequalities. Similarly, Block (2007) supported this argument by suggesting that power has major impacts on shaping the individual's identity. The findings highlighted two major elements of social structures which affected the Arab women's personal and educational choices: their sociocultural backgrounds and the educational system in the new country. The sociocultural norms and standards at the participants' home cultures reinforced gender inequalities that primarily limited their learning opportunities. Furthermore, gender positionalities at their home-cultures made their daily lives difficult and left them with limited their choices over their lives. Rind (2015) shed light on the impact of gender positionalities, as his findings showed how the Pakistani women were not able to access L2 learning resources and practice language because of the sociocultural perceptions and expectations of women. Similarly, several studies such as Muhammed (2010) and Alzeer (2016) highlighted how gender positionalities controlled adult females' language use and improvement, in which they were not comfortable to use the language with males. Although the focus of the present study was on the impact of gender positionality on education in general (including L1 and L2), the earlier studies examined this issue by presenting how gender positionality shape women's learning attitudes.

Second, the findings also presented that the Arab females went through identity transformation. Based on the findings, this change in identities was guided by the separation from the sociocultural standards of their home cultures. The participants' immigration and language learning experiences strengthened them so that they became independent and gained control over their choices and desires. A major reason for such identity transformation was their desire of acquiring a higher socioeconomic status and seeking better career opportunities. This finding echoes Grior (2014), who suggested that in addition to the cultural and social factors, L2 learning played a critical role in the females' identity transformation (p. 315). Interestingly, the geographic change that the participants experienced, which included a shift from one culture to a different culture, resulted in identity change and transformation. This change created a conflict of beliefs and values as the Arab females appreciated their home culture's values but at the same time, they refused some of these values. Such contradiction of feelings is known as ambivalence which refers to the "uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart" (Block, 2007, p. 864). For the present study's participants, ambivalence was observed throughout the interviews in which the women negotiated the differences between both their cultures and the target language culture. A sense of attachment to their cultural standards and values was observed. For instance, although some of the sociocultural expectations controlled her educational choices and made her life more difficult compared to men of her culture, Hadeel was determinant to raise her daughters in accordance to these sociocultural standards. She argued that these values were created to save and protect females from being manipulated by men, yet she admired the freedom that females experienced in the United States and how females have control over their desires and choices. Similarly, despite the negative influence of the sociocultural perceptions of females on her education, Amal presented similar attachment to

these sociocultural values in which she desired to raise her children according to her home culture's values.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Limitations and Implications

Although the findings of this narrative inquiry had successfully answered the research questions, there were limitations with the data collection method. The primary limitation of this thesis was the data collection sources because much of the data was collected through the interviews. Thus, using a variety of data collection sources such as classroom observations, written narratives, and detailed questionnaires would have strengthened the transferability of the study.

Another limitation of the present study was the limited time of the interviews as the interviewing process included two to three interviews with each participant. Although the interviews led to additional trajectories about identity and language learning experiences, longitudinal research would help to witness the change of identity that the participants went through and track their English language improvement. The longitudinal design would ensure a high level of trustfulness by enabling the researcher to examine the data several times and compare the change in the participants' identity and learning development.

Due to the participants' limited time and domestic responsibilities, scheduling the interviews was challenging. They had to cancel and reschedule the interviews appointments several times, which affected the data analysis time. Because of their domestic responsibilities and limited knowledge in technology, conducting online interviews (e.g., Skype) was impossible. Having enough time and knowledge in such online programs would save the researcher and the participants' time. It would allow the researcher to create a rich interviewing atmosphere and gain detailed data about their identities and learning experiences.

The above limitations provided insights for future research on identity, investment, and language learning and language learning educators. To gain greater insights about the impact of

adult females' identities on shaping their language learning experience, the future studies should consider using longitudinal designs to understand the dynamic relationships better. Also, using longitudinal narrative analysis would allow the researcher to understand this dynamic relationship= and explore the transformation of identity of ESL adult women immigrants. Besides focusing on the formal adult ESL learning contexts, future research on identity and ESL adult immigrants should pay attention to the community based non-profit learning contexts. Unfortunately, few studies had investigated issues of identity in such learning contexts. Due to the immigrants' socioeconomic status and family situations, a considerable number of adult immigrants join such learning sites to develop English proficiency and thus, improve their socioeconomic class. Investigating identity, investment, and language learning in such non-academic contexts would shed light on the learning challenges that these students face to develop communicative and linguistic abilities. Moreover, the results highlighted the importance of creating a safe space for ESL students to negotiate the differences (Papastergiadis, 2000). According to Block (2007), within the negotiation of differences, the language learner's "past and present" came together and guided the identity transformation (p. 864). Therefore, future research on identity in both formal and informal adult ESL education would help language learning educators in creating safe spaces to ensure a successful transition from the learners' home culture to the target language culture and language learning success. Finally, such research will help ESL and EFL educators in acknowledging that their learners' social needs and desires are inseparable from their linguistic needs (Norton, 2000, p. 48). Thus, as with Chang's (2016) study, the present study suggests that ESL educators should acknowledge their students' investment and desires by adopting a student-centered approach that enables their students to have their voices to be heard. Congruent with Chang's (2016) argument, such awareness of the language learner's identities and desires would help them in improving their language abilities and

acknowledge their capabilities in having control over their lives. Additionally, research on identity and language learning stress the importance of immigrant learners' need to access the target language social network to practice and develop their language abilities. Therefore, accessing such social network is hard and would not be realized unless the language educators encouraged such communicative environment.

Conclusion

This qualitative study supports Norton's (1994, 2000) argument regarding the dynamic role of the learners' identity in shaping their learning attitudes and experiences. The main purpose of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between the Arab females' identity and the language learning. Therefore, based on the interviews, it was concluded that the learner's sociocultural backgrounds played a critical role in facilitating or hinder the learner's access to the learning. The cultural standards and perception were subject to change, and its impact varied from culture to another culture. For instance, although the participants came from similar cultures, cultural differences were found such as the level of conservativeness and gender expectations. In the case of the Arab female participants, their gender identities governed their personal and educational choices and desires. Based on such observations, this study has concluded that sociocultural standards and perceptions may have implicitly encouraged gender inequalities. It was concluded from the present study that as immigrants, the female participants' investment in learning English intersected with their socioeconomic status, which in some cases lowered their levels of investment. Accordingly, the participants were torn between focusing on their domestic duties and improving their financial situations that distracted them from focusing on their ESL learning. Additionally, their low socioeconomic status hindered their chances of accessing a formal adult ESL education and getting sufficient learning amount and time. Thus, the limited time of the ESL classes and their identities as

immigrants hindered them from developing communicative language abilities and interacting with English native-speakers. However, only one participant, whose socioeconomic status was greater than the other participants, was able to overcome the conflict between investment and socioeconomic status by developing out-of-class communicative abilities.

Finally, the present study provides insights about identity transformation due to the females' immigration to the United States. The geographic and cultural transition resulted in identity change and enabled them to have control over their choices and desires. This change created a conflict of values and beliefs. On one hand, the participants acknowledged the differences between their home cultures and the target language culture, and how the sociocultural standards and expectation complicated their lives. On the other hand, despite the negative impact of some of the sociocultural expectations of females that reinforced gender inequalities, the participants preferred to raise their female children with these expectations. However, they all agreed that sociocultural afflictions and values should not influence their daughters' access to education and their participation in the society.

The examination of the role of the Arab females' identities on their investment and language learning experiences highlighted how identity, power, and language are interrelated. This denotes the important role of ESL and EFL educators in bridging the gap between the learners' cultures and the target language culture. Thus, it is essential for the ESL and EFL learning contexts to encourage the language learners in negotiating the differences between their sociocultural backgrounds and the target language culture. As Darvin and Norton's (2018) argued, by acknowledging the learners' linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds ESL/EFL educators will be able to involve their students in the learning process and help them in increasing their level of investment. Thus, implementing learning activities that involve negotiations of identities and power would assist the language learners to make successful transitions from their home-cultures to the target language culture. Such

identity negotiations will create a communicative language environment that would provide the language learner with access to the target language community.

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Appendix A

Interview Consent Form

As a MA Curriculum and Instruction – TESOL student at the University of Kansas, I am conducting a study about the relationship between the English language learner and her social and gender identity. Moreover, the study investigates the impact of social and gender identity on the learner's learning experience and her investment (motivation) in learning English. Therefore, I am interested in interviewing you and getting insights from your language learning experience in the United States. You are expected to participate in two to three interview sessions (one hour per a session). Also, before the interviews start you will fill out a background questionnaire which will help me to know you better. Your participation in this study is not obligatory, and you can quit anytime you decide.

Your involvement in study should not made you uncomfortable, and your participation may not benefit you directly. Your participation would help us to understanding the relationship between social and gender identity and English language learning experience. Also, it will provide better understanding to the influence of the learner's social identity and his or her investment in the learning. Your information will not be shared unless you give a written permission or it is required by law or university policy.

For the sake of this study, the interviews will be audio recorded, but it is not required for your participation. Your recording files will be recorded by the researcher (me), and only I and my academic supervisor will have access to these recordings. All the audio files will be stored in a device that is not connected to the internet and will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

By participating in the interviews, you agree to take a part of the study and confirm that you are above the age of 18 years. If you have any questions regarding this study or your participation, please feel free to contact me or my academic supervisor Professor Hyesun Cho at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction- TESOL. You are welcome to contact me through my phone (785)-551-0372 or email sarahsalrasheed@ku.edu. Also, you can contact Prof. Cho by phone at (785)864-9729 or by email at hcho@ku.edu. If you have any question regarding you rights as a participant in this research, you can email the Human Research Protection Program at irb@ku.edu or call them at (785) 864-7429.

If you agree to participate in this study please check (yes, I agree), and if do not agree to participate check (I do not agree). Kindly remember that your participation is voluntary.

- ☐ I agree to participate.
- ☐ I do not agree to participate.

The participant's name and signature

Date

.....

.....

Appendix B

Personal Background Questionnaire

Name (or pseudonym):

Date:

1. How old are you?

.....

2. Are you:

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Other

3. What is your nationality/s?

.....

4. Where did you born (country + city/ town)?

.....

5. What language/s do you speak?

.....

6. What is your marital status?

☐ Married

☐ Single

☐ None

7. How many kids do you have?

.....

8. What is you highest level of education?

☐ Elementary

☐ Middle School

☐ High School

☐ College / University

9. What was your occupation at your home country?

.....

10. What is your occupation in the U.S.?

.....

11. How long have you been in the U.S.?

.....

12. Did you receive English language education at you home country? How many years?

.....

Appendix C

For Recruitment References

Dear,

My name is Sarah AlRasheed, and currently I am a Master's student majoring in Curriculum and Instruction – TESOL at the University of Kansas. For my MA thesis project, I am researching the role of social identity (e.g. gender) on the language learning experience. Moreover, I am investigating how the English language learner's (ESL) investment (motivation) in the learning is affected by his or her social identity. Thus, I am looking for adult female students, in particular, Arabic native speakers to understand the impact of social identity and investment on the language learning process. I am wondering if you could be interested in participating in this research or know an Arab female student who might be willing to participate.

Propose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the language learner's social identity and her language learning experience. In addition, this study aims to investigate the impact of the learner's social identity (e.g. gender) on his or her investment (motivation) in learning the language.

Procedures of the Study

After filling out the personal background questionnaire, the participants will participate in two to three one hour interviews. The interviews will be face- to- face interviews and will

Eligibility Requirements

Participants must be adult ESL female student and a native speaker of Arabic. Also, the participant of the study must be above the age of 18 years.

Benefits

No monetary compensation will be given for participating in this research, but this study will provide in depth understanding of the impact of the learner's social identity on the language learning achievement and progress.

Risks

This study presents only minimal risks, and participating in this study should not cause discomfort than she would experience in daily life basis. The Participant can discontinue her participation in this study anytime she decides.

Contact Information

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, or if you are interested in participating in the study.

Sarah AlRasheed
(785)-551-0372
Sarahsalrasheed@ku.edu

Appendix D

Family and Cultural Background

- Tell me more about your culture? What is the most thing that you like or dislike in your culture?
- Tell me about your parents, their job, and level of education?
- How many siblings do you have? Which position are you in?
- What is your marital status? Any children?
- What is your husband's job, and level of education?
- What language do you use at home?
- What is your children's level of English?
- Do you faced any difficulties in dealing with their teachers/school?

Gender Roles

- In your country are the responsibilities of a mother the same as the responsibilities of a father to their families?
- What are the responsibilities of a father to his family?
- What are the responsibilities of a mother to her family?
- Are there different expectations for sons and daughters?
- What habits are deemed as appropriate for men but inappropriate for women?
- What behaviors are deemed as appropriate for men but inappropriate for women?
- What jobs are deemed as appropriate for men but inappropriate for women?
- What jobs do men do and women not do in your country?
- Who is regarded as the head of the family?
- Should boys and girls be brought up differently?
- Should boys and girls be treated differently on the part of the parents?
- Can a man and a woman be only friends?
- Do men/men friendships differ from women/men or women/women friendships? How?
- Who do you think has life easier, girls or guys? Why?
- Do you see yourself as a typical man/woman? Why or why not?